

HALTING ON THIS SIDE OF JORDAN,

OR,

SHALL YOUR BRETHREN GO TO WAR, AND SHALL YE SIT HERE?

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When the Israelites had conquered a part of the promised land, that part on the Eastern side of the Jordan, they remained many months encamped in the plains of Moab, whence they could look over to the richer and more populous region which was still to be subdued, and which constituted the choice and chief portion of their promised inheritance.

While there, the children of Reuben and Gad applied to have their portions assigned them at once, in this part of the country. The land was well adapted for pasture. These tribes were specially rich in flocks and herds, and they were desirous to secure so suitable a settlement.

Moses considered that this was the suggestion of insolence, avarice, or cowardice,—or all three; and proceeded accordingly to admonish them strictly. It was not strange that such suspicions should rise in his mind. There had been similar shrinking before from their destiny, and their duty. His whole experience had evinced the stubbornness and perversity of the people whom he had been called to lead. He appeals to them by the memory of the sins and the punishments, of their fathers. Happy are we, if a stronger appeal can be made to us, by the memory of our fathers' righteousness and blessings. Sad is it, when the righteous depart, and a generation rises up worse than their fathers.

It was to be remembered that the other tribes had received no lot, had not yet conquered their part; and they might complain, if one after another of the tribes were settled down, while they had still to fight for theirs, a land unseen and untrodden as yet by them. Moreover it was a bad precedent. The land, it had been understood, was to be divided by lot; and if these might select and claim their share, so might others, so might all. And, worse than all, it looked like disregard of the main central region, the true Land of Promise, like distrust of the power of God, to give them the whole land, like a breach of the compact implied in their setting out together to conquer the whole land. And so Moses presses them with the inquiry—"Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?" and with the fearful warning—"Be sure sin shall find you out."

They protested that they had no intention to commit the sin he supposed. They did not wish to take up their abode leaving the rest of the tribe with diminished forces, and discontented hearts to go on, in discouragement, to attempt the conquest of the remainder of the land. They desired only to locate their families, and leave their herds with the younger people as sufficient garrison for the fortified towns; but the armed men were ready to go over with their brethren to the war, and aid them in reconquering the land, in which their fathers had dwelt. The proposition in this form is accepted by Moses and their wish is gratified.

It is doubtful whether this was their original purpose, or whether they were really guilty of the design which Moses charged upon them. It is certain, however, that a similar sin is committed now, and the analogous errors of our own time may admit of profitable consideration.

A good deal has been said, sometimes in the language of indignant denunciation, sometimes in the more caustic phrases of bitter ridicule, of those prudent "*keepers at home*" in these times of general peril, who are ready to avail themselves of the flimsiest pretext for exemption, and to slink behind feigned diseases, or trades and professions long abandoned, to shield them from an honorable discharge of their duty to the country.

It is not my intention, nor is it necessary, that I address a word to this class. They are not in the army—where this tract will find its circulation.

There is another war, however, in which we are engaged with a deadlier foe than the Yankees—a war which demands and deserves the concentration of every man's powers, and which must be prosecuted with unanimous zeal, and with patient endurance to the—not bitter, but—glorious end. And yet there are those who are ready, in this Spiritual warfare, to halt on this side of Jordan, to leave to others the toils and the honors of these celestial victories, to sit still while their brethren go to war. I am afraid there *are* some of *these* in the army.

1. *There are some who "discourage the heart" of their brethren.* Everything, in war, depends on keeping up the spirit of the army. Defeat by overwhelming forces is nothing. Good soldiers can rally and try it again. But if the spirit is broken, whether by treacheries, by hardships and abuse, by multiplied desertions, by discouraging speeches from generals or comrades, failure is almost inevitable. Now there are, among those who profess to be Christians, some croakers, who never sing except to a mournful tune, some icebergs that radiate nothing except chilliness. Their influence, so far as they have any, is of a benumbing, deadning, freezing kind. Like followers who hang about the baggage trains of advancing regiments, always watching for a ride, they are always ready to be helped, always expecting to be taken care of and comforted, but never dreaming that they might help or take care of any body else. They have to be left behind, sitting still, or even worse, holding back whenever their brethren go forth to war. Now such people are accountable, not only for the harm they have individually done, and for the good they ought to have done, which they omitted, but also for the evil influence exerted on the others, and the good in them which has been paralyzed.

Are you one of these? Do you sit still when the trumpet sounds? When you see any one trying to advance the cause of Jesus, do you think he would be strengthened, or discouraged

by the course you take? Or does your manner and your conduct say to him, and to those whom he is trying to warn of their sin and danger "It is a false alarm, and you had better do as I do, sit still?"—It is very discouraging to those who with true zeal, are laboring to win souls, and especially to those unconverted persons who have begun to feel some concern about their souls, when they find entire indifference on the subject shown by those who profess to be Christians. These stationary christians are the trees behind which sinners shelter themselves, and skirmish, alas, with painful success.—Are you one of them?

2. *There are some who attend to their own conveniences and personal comfort first*, not only with a profound disregard how it may affect any one else, but with entire forgetfulness of its effect on their own eternal interests. The land which these Reubenites and Gadites chose, was goodly for situation, and suited exactly for their herds. But this haste to select and settle on their part, looked like greater regard for their own interest than for the general good. So is there not now sometimes more anxiety for the advancement of a particular denomination, than for the true progress of the cause of Christ? Is there not sometimes a willingness to build up at another's expense, to hinder one promising enterprise lest the magnitude and importance of some other might be diminished?

Perhaps, in Reubin's case, there was something of pride in it. He was the first born of Israel, but had lost his birth-right. Several of the tribes, Judah and Ephraim especially, had risen above him in numbers, wealth and influence, so that he could not expect in an equitable division, the best lot: therefore to sow the shadow of a birthright where he had forfeited the substance, he catches at the first lot, though out of Canaan, and far off from the tabernacle. Now religion has prior claims on all men. It demands in every heart the first place, the best place; but most men are eager to seek first all other things, and then the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness. Now both classes of things need attention; but suppose wereverse this usual order, and adopt the one which Jesus enjoins. Then we shall obtain the righteousness of God, and all other needful things

shall be added besides. The selfish, worldly choice is often, as in the case of Reuben and Gad, shown to have been least truly wise. First located indeed, they were but first displaced afterwards, first relapsing into idolatry, first carried into captivity, first passing into extinction. Severed gradually in interest and in sympathies, from those on the other side of the river, attempting a miserable neutrality, when enemies assailed the common cause, and buying inglorious and fatal peace instead of daring and winning in honorable warfare, their history remains a warning of what awaits those who hang back when common duty demands general sacrifices.

Now, that religion demands some sacrifices, some self denial, some energy, no one can deny. Its rewards cannot be obtained except at such a price: nor is this strange. Nothing else that is valuable is attainable without effort. Alas, there are many who are too indolent to be saved, too inert to receive a heavenly crown, who sit still when others are pressing on to the prize, who love their ease so well as to lose their souls.

3. *There are those who stop short in Christian progress, as if all the work were accomplished.* They have been just converted, perhaps, and conclude that now the important work is done. It is a mistake. It is just begun. They have only enlisted. They have yet to learn the use of their weapons, to acquire, by patient exercise, skill, rigor, endurance; and then, this is only preliminary to actual engagements, and real triumphs.

Or possibly, they are Christians who have lost the warmth of their first love, and who have now begun to feel well satisfied with themselves just when there is greatest reason for self reproach and self condemnation. They are as good as they need to be, as good as they are expected to be, as good—yes as good as they now want to be. Sad case! Their brethren are warring with all their might against the sins that still annoy, but Satan has lulled them into a delusive calm, a fatal slumber. They are sitting still, while their foundations are crumbling beneath them.

Incessant vigilance is the price of success in human warfare. It is even more so in the spiritual, as our enemies are more

watchful, eager and powerful. There must be constant aggression on the army of Satan. Every birth adds one to the ranks of evil: the hosts of God are losing by every death, and can only be replenished by conversions, by winning over our opponents.

4. *There are some who are always leaving their own work to be done by others.* It is so in wordly matters; it is so in spiritual matters. Every one has some work to do in this world. If not, he would not be left here, if he is already converted and fit for heaven. He would be taken thither at once. But the Master has appointed him, his time, his place, and his work too.

There is a curious feeling among many that there is a great deal to be done in the Redeemer's cause, very important to be done, in fact absolutely indispensable, and a very firm conviction that somebody ought to do it, without the idea once occurring to them that they have a share in the responsibility. This necessary labor is to be done by certain nameless persons, of whom all they know is, that *they* are not of the number. Christians ought to do so and so. It would be a shame for the church to do without this, or to neglect that. And yet, if all christians did exactly as much, in proportion to their ability, to promote these desirable ends, as they do, there would be *nothing* done.

No man can possibly do another man's work in religion. I do not mean merely that no man can do another's thinking, praying, believing for him; that no man can repent for another's sins, or exercise love and reverence to God in his place. But even those external acts, in which it seems more reasonable that the extra energy of one may supply the deficiencies occasioned by another's indolence, even those must be done by each one for himself.

Let us see how this is. Suppose there is a certain amount of visiting the sick, of personal effort with the unconverted, of other christian labors, which devolves on a particular church, or on a number of christians casually thrown together, as in an army. God knows how much it is, and he has portioned it out, so as to require of each one just as much as his

due—no more—no less. And he has told us how much this is. He requires of each of us, to serve and love him with all the heart, soul, mind, strength. No one can do more than this. Now, one man flinches from his duty, neglects it, overlooks it, and thinks to shift it on another's shoulders. That is impossible. Your neighbor cannot possibly undertake one jot or tittle of your work, because his hands are full—or ought to be—of his own. If you neglect it, it goes undone, necessarily undone—undone forever.

Every moment wasted, every opportunity lost of doing good, every favorable opening neglected, not only returns not to you, but offers itself to no other. It is gone. Others may come to be in like manner neglected, and in like manner to pass away; but these come no more to you, or to any.

Good men do, indeed, sometimes by neglecting their own proper work, attempt to supply the place left vacant by the folly or negligence of others, but they leave their own place vacant, in part and for a time at least, in so doing. It is a painful and lamentable thing to see faithful and true men almost overwhelmed with the cast off and neglected burdens of other men, which they are trying to bear, because they find their own efforts to do good hampered by the omissions and deficiencies of their associates, and their way clogged up by the undone duties others have left behind them.

There is a great work to be done for the salvation of the men in these Southern armies, a work which for many of them must be done soon, or not at all, a work which will bear on all the interests of our widely extended country, into which ere long these picked men of every district will be returning to season all circles with their influence, and to bless every community with the example of their virtues, or curse the land with the contagion of their vices. It has been often said, and truly, that there never was an army like ours. No sweepings of our streets, no floating froth, nor sunken dregs of our population made it up; but our best, our noblest, well nigh our all, are there. And, if this be true, never was such a field for usefulness opened before mortal man.

To this work of evangelizing the army, *every christian in it is*

specially invited. Chaplains, colportuers, missionaries, all may do their utmost, and yet there is room. Some are faithfully trying to do their duty. What are you doing? Are you—*can* you be sitting still? They owe the Lord no more than you. They owe the souls of men no more than you. Why should they engage in the work of the Lord, and you not? If it is regarded as toilsome and onerous, should they bear it all? If it pays back rich spiritual profit, and real happiness, ought they to enjoy it exclusively? If the land to be won is rich, fertile, glorious, will ye sit idly here, while they go and gain it?

What has been said so far, applies mainly to such as profess religion. Have the unconverted no interest here too? It is for your soul that many are striving and praying. Shall others be concerned for you, and you unconcerned for yourself? Shall they enter into the combat for your deliverance, while you stand coolly by, neutral, indifferent?

Will you be satisfied to take the land this side of Jordan, the fair but deceitful pleasures of this world, for your portion, and give up a hope and a home beyond the grave? Alas! How soon shall you be compelled to leave them! Be sure your sin will find you out. If not before, you will lament your wretched choice when you are called to pass over Jordan, with no kind hand to divide the waves. Ere you are settled in your boasted possessions, ere your houses have become warmed by your presence, you may be summoned away to another house, that appointed for all living. Or you may see your mistake earlier. You may choose, as Lot; the fair and fertile plains of Sodom, and live to see it desolate and blackened with the curse of God. No possessions are secure enough, no wealth ample enough to give true happiness without the favor of God. And with that, one can have peace passing all understanding, no matter what his earthly lot. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."